



State of Connecticut
Latino and Puerto Rican
Affairs Commission

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Special Projects Director

Lucia Goicoechea-Hernández

Associate Commission Analyst

Orlando Rodríguez

Administrative Assistant

Clarisa Cardone

MINUTES

Revised

LPRAC Regular Commission Meeting

December 16, 2015

Legislative Office Building Room 2D

Hartford, CT

5:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present:	Ramón L. Arroyo, Yolanda Castillo, Migdalia Castro, Richard A. Cruz, George Hernández, Dr. Ruby O'Neill, Dr. Agnes Quiñones, Christian Soto, Pablo Soto, Danny Torres and Elena Trueworthy, M.S.
Commissioners Absent:	Ana González, Jay González, Emanuela Palmares Leaf, Rubén Rodríguez, Dr. Eugene Salorio and Feny Taylor
Staff:	Werner Oyanadel, Executive Director, Lucia Goicoechea Hernández, Special Projects Director, Orlando Rodríguez, Associate Commission Analyst, Clarisa Cardone, Administrative Assistant, Nathaniel Velazquez, Intern and Juan Guevara, Intern

Tape 1 A

Commissioner Trueworthy started meeting as **Chairman Cruz** is running a little late. As Commissioner Palmares Leaf is absent, she asked Commissioner Yolanda Castillo, Treasurer to do the roll call. Quorum was not established at this time.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

Commissioner Trueworthy then introduced **Commissioner Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell**. She has been an educator in Connecticut for over 25 years. She was appointed as Commissioner of Education by Governor Dannel P. Malloy in April 2015, after serving as Interim Commissioner since January 2015. Dr. Wentzell began her career in education as a social studies teacher and later as a teacher for gifted students. Before her appointment as interim commissioner, she served as the State Department of Education's chief academic officer, overseeing the Bureau of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, and the Standards Implementation Division. Before joining the Department, Dr. Wentzell served as assistant superintendent of schools in Hartford, and in district leadership positions with a focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment in both South Windsor and the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) magnet schools. Dr. Wentzell has a bachelor's degree in Russian studies from Mount Holyoke College, a master's degree in educational leadership from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and a doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Hartford. She also spent some time as Assistant Superintendent for the Hartford School system.

- **Commissioner Dr. Wentzell** thanked everyone for having her and her staff attend LPRAC's commission meeting. She then introduced her staff, Cathy Dempsey, Chief Financial Officer; Maryann Butler, Chief Academic Officer; and Laura Stefan, Legislative Liaison. She looks forward to working together particularly on the issues that LPRAC raised, around equity, diversity and our English learners in our schools. She then spoke on the following items:
 1. Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) – related to legislation that was passed and enacted in 2012, school districts are now required to submit a school level financial data to their department using a universal chart of accounts. Municipalities have a similar requirement to utilize the UCOA to report data to the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and OPM contracted the accounting firm, BlumShapiro to design and implement the UCOA for both school districts and municipalities in CT. School districts have an option; they can use the UCOA system or they can use their old system and do a mapping to us which are the options that lot of school systems use.
 2. On the progress of their English Language Learners services and their bilingual process, they were very pleased last year to be invited to participate in an equity work group and it was very productive and they uncovered some important aspects how funding flows and how districts are serving kids. There were some recommendations that then become active in statute that came out last session around bilingual education in particular and they are making progress on that. At this point, local school districts that choose to provide up to 60 months of bilingual instruction are able to do so

under this new law that was passed last year. Right now we have not yet received any applications at the department to extend bilingual services. They continue to have a persistent shortage of bilingual educators in the State of CT. That shortage is one of the top 10 and in the next year school year it will be the number 1 in the shortage area. The shortage areas in math and science really compound this, the number of teachers who are able to teach math and science at the High School level in two languages is very, very small. We really need to put a lot of energy toward this as an entire state to encourage people who could go into this field to do so. They are also moving on a partnership with Central CT State University to look at ways of supporting all teachers who to teach students who are acquiring English while also learning whether it's elementary or later subject area in our schools and working on professional learning for our Veteran teaching staff in our school so they are more proficient as well. They are also studying the feasibility of using the Regional Educational Service Centers to assist the local and regional school boards who have what they refer to "low incidents", so this is where there are low enrollments of English learners not enough to qualify to have a bilingual program and they are looking to the reps to help support the program. The Uniform Chart of Accounts does not provide detailed information on how ELL funds are spent. However, Alliance Districts have to submit a plan on how ELL funds are being budgeted but they do not know how the funds are ultimately spent.

3. One of the big developments this year that they are very pleased about is that their state board of education recently passed the CT English language learner proficiency standards and these are new more rigorous standards for our English learners that align with the content standards in all the different areas. This really helps teachers understand that if a student is acquiring English at the same time that they are in their classroom, to make sure that they are moving along both in their content and moving along in college and career readiness while also acquiring English.
4. The State Department also by the new statute is required to collect and desegregate student data on the Mastery Tests to compare the students who are in bilingual programs in order to analyze the quality of the bilingual program.

Chairman Cruz apologized for being a little late and then announced that Commissioners Pablo Soto, Danny Torres and George Hernández are present and quorum was established. He also extended a welcome to State Representative Edwin Vargas who was present at the time.

Commissioner Chris Soto said that the Governor has made it clear that his focus area is Early Childhood Education, how about the students who are trying to attend post-secondary opportunities, is there anything formalized or not formalized , initiatives to help our students access college.

Commissioner Dr. Wentzell stated that Governor Malloy convened an Early College Taskforce that she has been on for the past couple of years and it looks at ways to help kids' access community college or other college resources while they are still in high school. There is plenty of research, especially for first generation college goers that indicate that comfort with a college level class while still in High School with the support of the high school around you can be a really good way to breakthrough and feel comfortable at college. Also, we recently moved from the Smarter Balance to the SAT. The Governor directed them to convene a working group last academic year and they studied the issue from many angles. One of the areas they were actually quite concerned with around moving to the SAT was whether there will be sufficient accommodation for English learners and they have negotiated very hard with college boards and almost have a signature on that. The English learners will be accommodated.

Tape 1 B

Commissioner Hernández said that one of the biggest challenges that the Latino students and families face in interacting with the school is the environment that they face when they walk in to a school, it is literally the ivory tower biting them and us big times. It is interesting to note that you were able to observe a holistic, integrated approach for these students where they have technology and have a qualified teacher and you were able to observe the 21st century first hand. The reality is that continually most school districts are still in the Stone Age in terms of how they respond to parents, in terms as to how they think outside the box and one of the biggest stomping blocks to our students and parents are the guidance counselors. The guidance counselors are insulting if not condescending to our parents, to our students and to our efforts to step outside of the box so that we can see something really happen. What are you intending to do or take initiatives to break this culture of ivory tower mentality in many of our school districts?

Commissioner Dr. Wentzell responded that it a very important question and there are a couple of parts of it. Around the welcoming school environment for parents at all levels and then the school counselors has an important intermediary to work with kids to realize their potential for post-secondary education. A couple of areas that they are working on, one is that we tried ourselves, we have a wonderful person in the same bureau where Dr. Quiñones serves that helps us tremendously in this area, Judy Carson. We have asked her to take a good look at us a department to really help us think differently about our own face that we put forward to parents and the public and we realized we had a lot of materials that had been developed around the new standards in English, Language, Arts and Math and the new assessments that were not necessarily parent friendly in any language but were only available in English. The worked with

a group including parents that helped them revise the materials so that their written material will be helpful and would be available in the 7 top languages in Connecticut.

Commissioner Hernández mentioned that the Guidance Counselor's office is a stone wall for our parents and our students and the big challenge is and we've heard to the contrary regarding the SAT's, that the reality is that if you proceed that way, you are empowering the Guidance Counselors to continue to do the same thing they have been doing for years which is to hold up the SAT standard, to hold up the SAT head-trip for our parents and our students before they become eligible for AP classes.

Chairman Cruz thanked Dr. Wentzell very much for coming, education is a very hot topic, we are very passionate about our students and education and this is not the end of our conversation I am sure we will have more conversations in the future. He then shared the floor to Commissioner Castro and then to Commissioner Quiñones.

Commissioner Castro would like to know the ratio, the numbers of students per district of how many counselors are bilingual that are serving our population.

Commissioner Dr. Wentzell said that she can get the information on the ratio of school counselors to kids in our districts and she can also find out how many people who hold a school counseling certificate in CT are also bilingual but she cannot get the people who do the crosswalk of where they are. She also mentioned that they are forming a Parent Advisory Council. She is looking for parents to meet with her three times a year. If any of the members of the commission could be engaged in it or have recommendations for the Council, our Chief of Staff is here, Kelly Donnelly and she is forming that Council now.

Commissioner Quiñones mentioned that Education is at the core of the mission of the commission. She thanked everyone for coming tonight and that she entertains future invites to come back to our commission in the future.

Chairman Cruz then introduced **Edwin Meléndez** who is a Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning at Hunter College. He was appointed as the Director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies in 2008. An economist by training, he has conducted considerable research in the areas of Puerto Rican and Latino studies, economic development, labor markets, and poverty. In addition to numerous scientific papers and other publications, he is the author or editor of twelve books. Professor Meléndez has an extensive record of community and public service, including numerous appointments to government and community boards, and has worked as a consultant to numerous government, community, and philanthropic foundations.

- **Edwin Meléndez** reported that Congress did not grant bankruptcy protection to the island of Puerto Rico. The economic crisis in Puerto Rico has led to a deep fiscal crisis and the economy is in need of great fixing and has led to a deterioration of social conditions and that humanitarian crisis has resulted in massive migration from Puerto Ricans to the U.S. at the tone of about half a million over the last seven or eight years and the population in Puerto Rico that used to be about 8.3million way back in 2007-2008 today is 5.2 million Puerto Ricans stateside and only 3.4 million Puerto Ricans in the island. Since the summer all of the resolutions and city councils and state legislators have enacted resolutions, they have signed letters collectively sent them to the Congress, to the President demanding action. Back in October, they had a summit in Florida. The elected officials met separately and decided to create a Caucus of elected officials. Mr. Candelaria joined some of the conference calls and he hopes Mr. Vargas does as well. A thousand people met at Congress and about 500-600 met with the elected officials and demanded action for Puerto Rico. We are trying to create coalitions from all the states. They are trying to organize membership organization and trying to create communication among labor leaders across the country, faith based organizations to try to raise awareness of the issue of Puerto Rico. They would also like to have this coalition that's emerging and he's not sure what the commission would like to do and one of the thing that he would like to do is organize so they can ask both the Republican and Democratic convention for the Puerto Rico issue to be put on the agenda, they would like the presidential candidates to address this issue and there might be some way to support each other.

Chairman Cruz thanked Mr. Meléndez for coming and mentioned that at the last Board Retreat a couple of months ago we had three speakers who gave us the whole picture of what the state of Puerto Rico was and thanked him for the update.

Commissioner Arroyo asked if the President of the United States through an Executive Order help that particular situation concerning Puerto Rico's economy.

Edwin Meléndez responded that is one of the options that they are examining; there are some experts that believe the treasury can act. When the financial system might be affected as a whole, there is a reason for the treasury to intervene, that's what they did with the banks, that is contentious. This is a political problem.

Mr. Oyanadel thanked Mr. Meléndez for driving here from New York to speak to the members of LPRAC. The urgency of this issue is something that LPRAC needs to keep in mind. During the summer, the commission met with a number of professors and experts on this field to give us a historical background about the issues that are relevant to this dialogue. For instance, we heard from Professor Luis Figueroa from Trinity College about the historical context. He also raised the issue that Commissioner Arroyo asked earlier which is why the Obama Administration hasn't been involved thus far. We also heard from Dr. Charles Venator Santiago about the politics involved with the crisis and finally we heard from Ingrid Alvarez from the Hispanic Federation about what is already being done in Connecticut as result of this economic crisis in Puerto Rico. Bankruptcy protection is only one way of helping but there are a number of other ways to help Puerto Rico start growing their economy. The Commission will certainly be involved and so we appreciate your call to have LPRAC unite with national Puerto Rican organizations getting ready to help Puerto Rico avoid a humanitarian crisis. Migration of young Puerto Rican —Spanish monolingual— professionals already started several years in a row. If the economic crisis in Puerto Rico evolves we may see a higher migration to Connecticut from the overall Puerto Rican population (i.e., lower and middle class population groups).

Tape 2 A

State Representative Edwin Vargas said that he has been involved in this issue from the beginning with Mr. Oyanadel and others that have been involved on this pressing our congressional delegation to take an active role. We have already seen the migration that Mr. Oyanadel is talking about in places like Florida, New York, New Jersey and Connecticut and it's going to accelerate and accelerate and also the impact on retirement funds all over the country that are heavily invested on Puerto Rico bonds because they paid a higher interest rate because investors knew that they couldn't go bankrupt so they felt that it was a guarantee that their investments were safe. Unfortunately this situation, he believes there was a reason why the Republicans did not want to give Puerto Rico the right to bankruptcy because they believe they are protecting the bond holders and Wall Street interests because if you go into bankruptcy protection, the bond holders have to accept a lower return on their investments. The problem is you can't protect the investors and protect the people in Puerto Rico at the same time unless there is an infusion of cash or some new credit, it's a delicate situation. He then thanked LPRAC for hosting Mr. Melendez and giving him the opportunity to give you an update on this issue.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion made to accept the minutes of November 18, 2015 by Commissioner Trueworthy and seconded by Commissioner Castro. Motion was adopted by voice vote.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

TABLED

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

TABLED

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE REPORT

TABLED

PRIORITIES & LEGISLATION COMMITTEE REPORT

TABLED

SPECIAL PROJECTS COMMITTEE REPORT

TABLED

RBA COMMITTEE

TABLED

OLD BUSINESS AND NEW BUSINESS

ADHOC COMMITTEE ON ENDORSEMENT REPORT

Motion made to approve the AdHoc Committee Report, with an amendment, bottom of page 3 in the Executive Director's Report reads the language that will be incorporated into the endorsement process by Commissioner Castro and seconded by Commissioner Castillo. Motion was adopted by voice vote.

Motion made to approve the final report of the 2016 LPRAC Legislative Agenda it by Commissioner Castro and seconded by Commissioner Castillo.

Discussion:

Commissioner Pablo Soto reported that he does disagree with some of the issues in the report but he will vote on it and there are some that he does agree and support.

Motion was adopted by voice vote.

An omnibus motion made to approve and authorize the Special Projects Committee to the following procedural items as follows:

- Award at least 20 regular scholarships and at least 5 GED scholarships contingent on funds raised;
- That we name the regular scholarship after Juan Fuentes Vizcarrondo and the GED scholarship after Antonio Pantoja;
- That we award 2 each for Latina, Latino and community service awards in 2016;
- That the advertising rate sheets are presented are approved for fundraising in 2016;
- That Orquesta Afinke and DJ Robert Silva be contracted once again in 2016;
- That we hold our annual retreat at the Old Judiciary Room on Saturday either September 10 or 17, 2016 with only breakfast and lunch served;
- That the lifetime achievement award recipient be selected at the same time as the rest of the awards in July in order to help promote sales.

Also a motion to approve the AdHoc Committee on Endorsements Report and a motion to approve the final report of the 2016 LPRAC Legislative Agenda made by Commissioner Torres and seconded by Commissioner Castro.

Discussion:

Commissioner Arroyo spoke against the concept of awarding 20 regular scholarships as recommended by the Special Projects Committee. He would personally prefer to reduce the number of scholarships so that the dollar amount for each recipient could be increased. He indicated that he would vote against the omnibus motion.

Mr. Oyanadel encouraged all LPRAC Commissioners that have a number of questions about ongoing annual projects or differences of opinion with recommendations provided by our standing committees to make a strong effort to speak up and participate at the committees' vetting these issues rather than at the main Commission meeting. This is done to avoid long explanatory differences of opinion or long dialogues during the monthly meetings.

Commissioner Arroyo disagreed with Mr. Oyanadel stating that he and all LPRAC Commissioners should be given ample time to discuss these topics because not every Commissioner can attend all internal LPRAC committees and therefore he should be given the courtesy to ask questions as he sees fit. He expressed a sentiment that he should not be asked – or be expected – to be a “rubber stamp” to the will of the Special Projects Committee of LPRAC.

Commissioner O'Neill asked about the rationale behind LPRAC's scholarship program renaming it to Juan Fuentes and Antonia Pantoja. She also agreed with Commissioner Arroyo's comments.

Mrs. Goicoechea-Hernandez – in response to the question about why the Special Projects Committee recommended renaming LPRAC's scholarship to Latino leaders that are important in our community – is due in large part to recommendations she received from experts on the field that have advised her and her committee the sole act of naming our scholarship program to local Puerto Rican leaders with a strong legacy in our community would help LPRAC increase participation rates of students seeking our scholarships, which in turn has the potential of igniting higher monetary contributions to our agency's scholarship program. Both Juan Fuentes Vizcarrondo and Antonio Pantoja have left a strong cultural legacies in our community – Mr. Fuentes-Vizcarrondo, a longtime Hartford Resident was (1) a renown photographer who utilized his photos to chronicle Puerto Rican life in Connecticut; (2) Korean war veteran, and (3) mentor. Antonia Pantoja was an educator, civil rights leader and most importantly the founder of ASPIRA.

Motion carries as follows:

6 Yeas: Commissioners Castillo, Hernández, Quiñones, Chris Soto, Torres and Trueworthy

2 Nays: Commissioner Arroyo and O'Neill

2 Abstentions: Commissioners Castro and Pablo Soto

Motion made to table some concerns about some apparent noncompliance with the selection of scholarship selections in the Latino of the Year Award until our next meeting in January 2016 by Commissioner O'Neill and seconded by Commissioner Castillo. Motion was adopted by voice vote.

Motion made to adjourn at 7:30 p.m. by Commissioner Trueworthy and seconded by Commissioner Castro . Motion was adopted by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted by,

Emanuela Palmares
Secretary
LPRAC Board

EPL:cjc